



Southern Connecticut
State University

Department of Counseling and School Psychology
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Testimony of Jennifer Parzych
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in support of
SB 186 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL COUNSELORS.
Education Committee- February 26, 2018

Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee, my name is Jennifer Parzych and I am an assistant professor in the school counseling program at Southern Connecticut State University, and Government Relations Co-Chair and Treasurer of the Connecticut School Counselor Association. Thank you for the opportunity to offer **testimony in support of Senate Bill 186- An Act Concerning School Counselors.**

Language amendments to current state statutes which only identify guidance counselors are necessary to accurately identify the over 97% certified by the State Department of Education as *school counselors*. What's in a name, you may ask? A considerable distinction that defines a role in serving student needs. I have held my certification in Connecticut as a school counselor since 1997. Prior to becoming a counselor educator, I was a school counselor for 15 years, predominantly at the middle school level. At the time of my initial preparation to become a school counselor, the Connecticut Comprehensive Model included a proactive program of services delivered to all students, not simply the students who would seek out assistance.

In the more that 20 years that have passed, the Connecticut Comprehensive Model has strengthened to include accountability at the program's core. In other words, school counselors implementing a comprehensive program are using data to inform decisions, eliminating barriers to student success, delivering a planned program including curriculum designed around mindsets and behaviors aligned with the Connecticut Core Standards, advocating for student needs, and supporting the academic, social-emotional, post-secondary and career development for all students. The former certification was in guidance counseling; however, this outdated terminology reflects a reactive role, one in which responds to individual needs as they arise. Responsive services are indeed vital, but it's the comprehensive nature of the role and programming of school counseling that promotes essential prevention as well.

Connecticut does not require public school districts to employ certified school counselors at any level. Of the 206 public school districts in our state, only 58 districts have elementary schools with school counseling programs (based on 2015-2016 CSDE data). Approximately three quarters (72%) of school districts provide no comprehensive school counseling services to students in grades K – 6. Of the 28% of school districts with elementary school counseling

programs, many elementary school counselors are providing services to multiple schools and/or are less than full-time employees. In our urban districts and those with highest socioeconomic need, the ratio of school counselors to students is as high as 1:602 at the middle school level, and 1:431 at the high school level. Conversely, in districts with the highest median income, the ratio of school counselors to students does not exceed 1:390 at the middle school level, or 1:248 at the high school level. The American School Counselor Association recommends ratios not to exceed 1:250 students. It is clear from Connecticut's statistics; an equity gap also exists in a student's access to school counseling.

Research continues to build nationally and in our very state, demonstrating the impact of comprehensive school counseling programs on performance indicators of improved attendance, decreased suspension rates, greater achievement, higher graduation and post-secondary enrollment rates. The burgeoning caseloads that exist in Connecticut, including limited to no access for our youngest students, take school counselors away from proactive interventions by placing increased need for responsive, reactive services. In many respects, the work being done takes on the form of *guidance counseling*, in tracking "how many students did I see today" rather than "how are students different as a result" of the *school counseling* program. To be sure, a school counselor needs to intentionally seek out ongoing professional development opportunities which strengthen their ability to impact each student's success, with evidence of effectiveness at the heart of the work they do.

I respectfully ask that you amend the underlying bill to include the Connecticut School Counselor Association proposal to have the State Board of Education adopt guidelines and recommendations for a comprehensive school counseling program. The language states:

The State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Connecticut School Counselor Association, shall adopt guidelines and recommendations to ensure that all students have access to a comprehensive school counseling programing. Such recommendations shall ensure that academic, social-emotional, and post-secondary and career readiness programming is delivered by a certified school counselor with adequate training. The State Board of Education shall make any such guidelines and recommendations available to local and regional boards of education.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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